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SUBJECT: MORALES' NOT SO EXCELLENT UNGA ADVENTURE; DEA
UPDATE

REF: SECSTATE 103490

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary: An MFA insider and one of Bolivia's UNGA organizers provided PolOff October 4 with an inside look at the Bolivian UNGA delegation's schedule. President Evo Morales had heated discussions with EU officials, telling one the EU "could leave" Bolivia if it wanted, Choquehuanca had a "bad" meeting with A/S Shannon (reftel), and both were furious that CNN canceled an interview with Morales, blaming USG interference. The Bolivians downgraded their participation in a foreign minister-level meeting with North Korea to director-level, with no likely formal establishment of diplomatic ties expected until after a Bolivian constitutional referendum. Morales refused to meet with Congressman Gregory Meeks. A core group of Venezuela, Bolivia, Iran, and Russia plans to meet in Caracas October 10-11 to discuss establishing an OPEC-like group of natural gas producers. Our contact plans to try to talk Choquehuanca into a face-saving compromise to reverse Morales' recent decision to ban DEA flights. Meanwhile, Morales publicly commented October 4 that he would no longer allow DEA flights to "spy" on Bolivia. End Summary.

Series of "Very Bad Meetings"

12. (C) According to MFA Director of Policy Planning and co-organizer for Bolivia's UNGA delegation Jorge Caballero (strictly protect), Bolivian President Evo Morales and Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca were decidedly grumpy throughout their stays in New York. Caballero said Choquehuanca's September 22 meeting with A/S Tom Shannon was one in a series of "very bad meetings" (reftel). Although Caballero did not attend the meeting, he said Choquehuanca told him he "did not expect" Shannon's stern demeanor and message. Caballero said Choquehuanca "seemed confused and tense after the meeting." He said the following day Morales was supposed to have an interview with CNN, but the interview

was canceled by CNN a few hours prior. Choquehuanca and Morales grumbled that a secret service detail sent to CNN for advance security had scuttled the interview, acting on orders from Shannon. Caballero commented that this was pure speculation, as he took the CNN call and the network provided no explanation.

13. (C) Morales also had "very negative" meetings with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External Affairs, and Jose Manuel Barrosa, President of the EU Commission. Morales basically ignored any criticism from both leaders outright and told Barrosa the EU could "leave (Bolivia) if you want, we will survive without you." Ferrero's pleas for "serious" political dialogue and both officials' attempts to steer Morales to a more conciliatory position regarding Bolivia's rejection of a CAN/EU agreement were "simply not addressed." Both left visibly frustrated following short meetings, according to Caballero.

Evo: No Time for U.S. Congressmen

14. (C) U.S. Congressman Gregory Meeks attempted to schedule a breakfast with Morales "several times" but was summarily rejected. Caballero did not know why Morales refused to meet Meeks and declined to schedule meetings with any other U.S. Congressmen. Caballero said Morales "treated the meeting as a complete waste of his time." Caballero said MFA leadership had hoped that Presidential nominee Senator Barak Obama would meet with Morales and felt slighted when this request was apparently ignored.

15. (C) Caballero postulated that Morales fundamentally does not understand the independence of the U.S. Congress and may have written it off as subservient to the wishes of President Bush, mistakenly projecting the executive-legislative dynamic that exists in Bolivia on the United States. Caballero said Minister Choquehuanca and other senior MFA leaders expected that actions aimed against the USG, such as expelling USAID and DEA from Bolivia's Chapare region and expelling Ambassador Philip Goldberg, would be viewed through a partisan lens in the Washington as an attack against the Bush Administration. Caballero claimed the bipartisan response from Washington condemning such actions "surprised" Choquehuanca and undermined MFA assumptions that "everything will be different with a President Obama."

North Korean Meeting Downgraded; Relations on Hold

16. (C) Caballero claimed he talked Choquehuanca out of meeting with the North Korean Foreign Minister because "there is nothing in it for us." Instead, Director of Bilateral Affairs Jean Paul Guevara attended the meeting. Caballero said Guevara, the intellectual author of opening relations with Iran and Libya, is battling with "pretty much the rest of the Foreign Ministry" to formally open relations with North Korea. He said even political appointees in the MFA are afraid that formal North Korean relations could unnecessarily alienate South Korea, a country with a large development assistance budget in Bolivia and a particularly close relationship with the MFA, to which it donates vehicles and technical equipment. The government has postponed a decision on North Korean relations until after the constitutional referendum planned for January 25, which Caballero claimed is already considered inevitability in the MFA, despite the fact that it has not legally been convoked (septel).

Anti-U.S. Natural Gas Producers Group; Russia Courts Bolivia

17. (C) Caballero said Bolivian meetings along the margins of the UNGA with Venezuela and Russia resulted in a follow-on meeting in Caracas October 10-11 to discuss formation of "an OPEC-like group of gas producing nations." Besides Bolivia, Venezuela, and Russia, Caballero said Iran and possibly Libya

would participate. Other non-gas producing allies such as Cuba and Nicaragua may be invited as observers, but this was not yet agreed upon as of the first week of October. Russia was "very active" during side meetings at the UNGA with South American nations and with the Bolivian delegation in particular, according to Caballero, pressing for a larger counter-narcotics role in Bolivia. Caballero did not attend the Russia meetings, but suspects Russia is more interested in exploiting Bolivia's cocaine production than combating it.

USG Reaction Bolsters Careerists

¶18. (C) Caballero said Choquehuanca gave Morales "bad advice" minimizing the potential USG reaction to concrete attacks against the U.S. Mission in Bolivia. This has bolstered the standing of careerists with Choquehuanca, like Caballero, who warned against such actions, at the expense of MFA political appointees and palace advisors who thought "nothing would happen until 2009." Political appointees also badly misunderstood ATPDEA and the ability of President Bush to suspend it pending decertification, confident that suspension was solely a congressional decision.

Careerist to Propose Reversal of DEA Flight Ban

¶19. (C) Caballero plans to propose a reversal of the October 2 decision to ban DEA flights in Bolivia. He will propose to Choquehuanca October 7 that the MFA draft a "compromise" agreement banning use of such flights for surveillance. Since the flights are not used for surveillance, nothing would change but the government could still claim a symbolic victory against U.S. "aggression." Caballero plans to argue that letting the ban stand might put at risk all USG counter-narcotics assistance and, perhaps, impact other bilateral assistance as well.

Comment

¶10. (C) We are heartened that Caballero and other MFA careerists continue to try and offer good advice to FM Choquehuanca, but we expect his efforts to reverse the DEA flight ban will be dead on arrival. Other contacts in the MAS and public statements October 4 by Morales himself indicate that, sooner or later, the Government will reduce or cut USG counter-narcotics cooperation. Morales stopped short of stating he would cut aid outright or establishing a timeline for a reduction in CN cooperation, instead emphasizing that Bolivia "does not need" outside (read U.S.) help with its counter-narcotics efforts and equating the flights to "spying." Morales added that "it is better that it (DEA) leaves the country along with the U.S. Ambassador." Last year we might have dismissed this as anti-Yankee hyperbole, but, with such bombast being followed by actions in 2008, we can only wait to see if and when the other shoe will drop. End Comment.

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